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## **TRADITIONS OF S.-TS. TSYBIKOV SCHOOL AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE ART OF MODERN MASTERS**

In Soviet period “datsan art” in Buryatia for a long time was a closed topic, the lamas’ names were concealed, and Buddhist ritual objects remained “under lock” in the museums’ vaults. Most of the datsans were destroyed, and the Buryat works of art were destroyed with them, since this art was, for the most part, religious. Many ritual objects were exported from Buryatia, lost or destroyed.

The Buddhist collection of the M. N. Khangalov Museum of the History of Buryatia was gathered from the destroyed datsans in 1930s; most of the Buddhist sculptures were brought in from the Yangzhinsky datsan.

Buddhist art from Buryatia was exhibited for the first time in Moscow, in 1970, at the exhibition called “Buddhist Art of Buryatia, XVIII – Beginning of XX Centuries”, and later, in 1971, in the city of Ulan-Ude. This was the beginning of the research and scholarly attribution of Buddhist collections. Museum personnel – namely, curators Zh. Zh. Zhabon and N. B. Badlayeva – found informers who could name the authors of the artworks and tell something about them. Despite the fact that Buddhist art was for the most part anonymous, there were still living witnesses who remembered the masters. As a result, the exhibition catalogue contained, for the first time, the names of many datsan artists.

1963 saw the publication of an article co-written by a local historian G. L. Lenhoboyev and a Buddhist scholar K. M. Gerasimova, “Materialy o narodnykh umeltsakh Orongoya” (“Materials on Folk Craftsmen of Orongoy”) [Lenhoboyev, Gerasimova, p. 135–153]. This article mentioned for the first time the name of sculptor, architect, construction project manager, lama of Yangzhinsky datsan Sanzhi-Tsybik Tsybikov.

Buddhist ritual art flowered at the end of XIX and beginning of the XX century. This outstanding period of Buryat iconographic culture is exemplified by the sculpture works of “uran darhan” S.-Ts. Tsybikov and his pupils. The school of S.-Ts. Tsybikov was the first in the line of established

Buryat artistic styles and schools. The emergence and development of this school in this particular region was facilitated by the traditions of folk art, the transmission of knowledge and experience through the generations of wood carvers, of wood handling methods, as well as by the re-thinking and reinterpretation of the received knowledge. But, there was also a need for a famous master whose art could be venerated. Such was the master who fully satisfied the ethical requirements for a Buddhist artist — lama-philosopher by education, artist Sanzhi-Tsybik Tsybikov (1877–1934), who had lived not very long but bright life. He was destined to create a school of wood carving, the school of famous Orongoy all-round sculptors who left an exceptionally bright trace in the Buryat art. The works of these masters are considered exemplary; they left a noticeable trace in Buryat iconographic art.

S.-Ts. Tsybikov was born in Ochir-Bulak ulus, not far from the village of Vehnyaya Ivolga. He was a huvarak — a novice at Yangazhinsky datsan, where he finished his studies in tsannit-datsan (department of philosophy), reaching a rank of gebshi, and then a gabzha, i. e. he was a philosopher with a highest rank available in Buryat datsans. But his life took another turn. He began to work in carving, sculpture and construction. Gradually, he gathered around him local craftsmen and artisans who later became part of his famous school.

Since his childhood, Sanzhi-Tsybik loved to make animal figurines from the clay which he found not far from his home. The witnesses remembered that he had been always carving or making something; always working with his hands. Even while talking to somebody, he could suddenly begin to carve or mold something. The master put to practical use the knowledge received during his studies, since general datsan education included the study of art theory, iconography and canons. Being an expert in the canons of Buddhist art, the master could single-handedly make calculations and draw the schemes for the images of different deities; he studied the modules — measures based on the size of palms and fingers (angulas) and ultimately could teach all this to his pupils.

The act of making divine images was considered magical. It was forbidden to do this without spiritual initiation; one had to have a kind of “admission” to the depiction of sacred images. Only people belonging to lama class and inducted into a special ritual, could work in icon painting and sculpture. The technique of “gods” making has a certain sacred meaning. The process of statue-making was, in essence, a kind of worship, and of course it was not intended for transmission to outsiders. In order to represent a deity, an artist should have had the knowledge of the structure of its worship at different levels of temple and everyday rituals.

Many artist used ready-made manuals, the so called “tiks” (*Tib.* — tik-za-chan-del, *Mong.* — tigei nom), containing exact calculations and schemes for depiction of different classes of deities (ashtatala and dash-

tatala systems) dating back to the ancient Indian iconometric treatises, and also to the traditions of Kalachakra and Samvara-tantra. Apart from these, there were ready-made stencil patterns for the drawings of deities. Not all masters knew Tibetan language, and it was hard to decipher drawing schemes and calculations. That's why most of the folk artists copied the ready-made patterns, under the guidance of experienced zura-shin lamas. The works which departed from canon rules were destroyed, because it was believed that they could harm not only an artist and his client, but also the whole datsan parish.

S.-Ts. Tsybikov chose his assistants himself; he tested their abilities, watched how they completed his tasks and kept only the most gifted and skillful. The main assistant sculptors of this outstanding master were Garma Lenkhoboyev, the brothers Dashi and Munko Sanzhiyev, Zhimba Zhambain, Daba Zhamsaranov and others. Overall, the school included about 30 masters. The school gathered together fully to work on a big commission, or to make monumental sculptures.

S.-Ts. Tsybikov was tall, ascetic looking, quiet and reserved, short-spoken, simple in his everyday needs, but very demanding in his art. Contemporaries noticed his generosity of heart, his kindness and respectful attitude towards others. His relatives managed to keep only one of his photographs, where he is sitting together with the lamas of Yangazhinsky datsan. The photograph is poorly preserved — facial features are indistinct — but it draws attention to his kind and slightly sad eyes, as well as his artistic hands — slender, beautiful wrists with long fingers.

S.-Ts. Tsybikov was not only a lama-philosopher and a talented artist; he also possessed an outstanding personality, and was an organizer and creator of a whole school of regional all-round masters. He was gradually becoming an established authority figure, a famous artist who was respectfully called Bagsha (Buryat), i. e. the Teacher. Leading iconometric treatises include the following ethical norms and demands to the personality and behavior of an artist: “an artist, a servant of art should be an exemplary person, have a clear mind and clear soul, be modest, patient, and steadfast in difficulties and privations. He should be generous, free from poisonous doubts, spite, malice, rivalry and a search for personal fame and profit. An artist should constantly perfect his skills, know all technical rules, canonical proportions and compositions, observe obligatory unity of form and content of the sacred images” [Gerasimova, p. 89–90]. Gabja-lama S.-Ts. Tsybikov fully met all these strict requirements.

The master's main work is surely the sculptural ensemble of the Yangazhinsky datsan dated by the turn of the XX century. This datsan is considered unique, since all its monastery complex with nine temples-dugans, with the interior and exterior design, with sculptures and paintings, was built and decorated by the masters of Yangazhinsky parish popularly known as “Orongoy” masters, based on the name of the region.

One of the most famous — and almost legendary — of the Master's sculptural works is a colossal statue of the Buddha of the Future, Majdari. To make this statue, 20 carts of trees were carried from the cedar stow near Ivolga.

Buddhist sculptures were made hollow inside, so that this emptiness could be filled, transforming the sculpture into a magical reality. When worshipping a deity, a believer saw not only the outer shell, but also the inner ritual essence. The statue of Majdari was filled with a multitude of ritual texts, gifts, silk scarves — the hadaks, grains, fragrant herbs and semi-precious stones. The sculpture was painted with mineral paints, gilded, and then consecrated, after which for the whole parish it became a relic, an incarnation of the Buddha of the Future. By praying to him, the worshippers came into the direct contact with the deity and could ask him for help and protection. There is a photograph of this monument, 16 meters in height, which was kept in a special temple of Majdarin sume. Majdari's head reached the level of the 3d floor of this sume. Religion and philosophy allowed Buddhist artists to create an image full of extraordinary spirituality and vitality.

For S.-Ts. Tsybikov, wood was the main creative material. He particularly loved to work with a cedar, whose soft timber easily yielded to his cutter, and whose plastic qualities corresponded with the master's striving toward succinctness and generality of forms.

During his short life, the Master managed to do a lot, his creative energy was enormous. He worked not only for Yangazhinsky datsan, but also for Hambin Hure (Tamchinsky or Gusinozersky datsan), which commissioned him a splendid arrangement of Devajin (the Western paradise — the "pure land" of Buddha Amitabha).

Time preserved one of the unique sculpture groups — the three-dimensional mandala of Dhyani Buddha Sarvavid (All-Knowing) Vairocana (*Sansk.*) or Gunrig (*Bur.*) made by the masters headed by S.-Ts. Tsybikov for the Gunrig sume of the Yangazhinski datsan. Buddha Vairocana mandala is considered one of the most ancient Indian mandalas; it belongs to the Yoga Tantra class. We know that the dwelling of this deity — the land of *Akanishtha* (*Sansk.*) is considered the highest and most perfect of all the worlds. The importance and popularity of this cult in Buryat Buddhism is attested to by the fact that before the revolution, 23 datsans of Buryatia had Gunrig sumes. The veneration of mandala deities during life grants the soul of the deceased salvation from bad reincarnations, changes of bad karma and a rebirth in the paradisiacal "pure lands" in various parts of cosmic space.

Not all parts of the Gunrig mandala complex became part of the museum collection; only 34 out of 37 figures were preserved, but badly damaged, with lost fragments and attributes. One thangka preserved from



Yangazhinsky datsan — “The Mystical Cycle of 37 Deities of Gunrig Mandala” — shows the widespread use of this ritual in datsans. It had its special ritual texts — sokshods.

At the beginning of 1980s, the mandala sculpture was restored, attributed thanks to the help of Hambo-lama Zh. Erdyneyev; a photo book and a miniature model showing the restoration of this monument by the State Hermitage restorer (Leningrad) M. N. Lebel was created; tibetologist D. Dashiev translated the ritual Tantra of Sarvavid Tathagata from Tibetan texts.

In 1998, Museum of the History of Buryatia hold an exhibition titled “Buddhist Art”, which for the first time showed a lot of works by S.-Ts. Tsybikov and his disciples. Among the exhibited works were 25 sculptures of Gunrig mandala, the three Buddhas of Longevity: White Tara, Ayusha and Zugder Namgilma, the figure of Zhamsaran, the formidable defender of faith, accompanied by the rare iconographic image of his mountain dwelling — Zhamsaranai oron. The three Buddhas of longevity not only form the unified iconographic complex; it is also unified in style and in spiritual force which brings these figures together in the single ensemble. Particularly worthy of note is an image of Buddha Ayusha (*Sanskrit*. Aminayus) made according to the highest iconographical canons and representing the highest “reference point” of the artist’s skill. The force of artistic generalization, the technical and plastic rendering of beauty of the male deity, the expressiveness of facial features — all combine to show the recognizable style of a philosopher artist.

According to the contemporaries’ reminiscences, the central temple of the datsan housed the posthumous sculpture of its abbot — the datsan *shiretui* Banzaraktsayev Lubsan Nindaga who headed the datsan for 23 years and greatly contributed to its development. He was called “Burhan-lama” and greatly respected. The sculpture was made by S.-Ts. Tsybikov, it shows portrait likeness, and at the same time the generalized image of a spiritual Teacher and mentor. The sculpture widened the range of posthumous portraits of famous Buryat lamas who reached high levels in practicing and strengthening the Buddhist faith.

Northern Buddhists particularly venerated images of the Teachers — the masters and promoters of the Law. The most venerated one was the image of Je Tsongkhapa (1357 — 1419), the great religious Buddhist leader of Tibet who created the Gelugpa School (“followers of the way of virtue”) also known as the “Yellow Hats”. Lama Tsongkhapa was venerated as Buddha. The teaching of his school became widespread thanks to an active promotion by his disciples and the building of new monasteries; later it became an official religion of Tibet. The cult of Tsongkhapa himself, as well as the triad of “Tsongkhapa with his disciples Zhalsab-zhi and Haidab-zhi” was widespread in Buryatia.

Museum collection of items from Yangazhinsky datsan includes several examples of the images of Tsongkhapa and the group of "Tsongkhapa with his disciples". The earliest work of S.-Ts. Tsybikov is considered to be the sculpture portrait of Tsongkhapa made of wood, with finely made details and an exquisite ornamental painting. This image with external features of contentment and prosperity is closer to the popular folk tradition. However, the artist's individual style is already visible here, where a particular plastic and an exquisite work on details combine with the type of a lotus throne and a gilded painting. Another image of Tsongkhapa is a monumental work (about one meter high) depicting a sitting figure with broad chest and shoulders, with a "lion-like" torso. According to the canons of Buddhist art, "lion-like torso" symbolizes not only physical strength, but also spiritual might.

According to the museum's book of records, the magnificent triad "Tsongkhapa with his disciples Zhalsab-zhi and Haidab-zhi" belonged to Hambo Lama Dashi-Dorzho Itigelov (1852–1927). In stylistic terms, these sculptures are similar to S.-Ts. Tsybikov's works. It is easy to assume that the Master made these sculptures under a special commission from Hambo Lama, or as a gift to his Teacher.

The Master's individual works include the figures of White Tara, the goddess of mercy; of the Four-Faced Avalokiteṣvara, bodhisattva of infinite compassion; of Maitreya the Buddha of the Future; of Vairocana, the Buddha of meditation — all of which are similar in technique, plastic patterns, proportion of forms, and in those spirituality and sublimity of images which are so typical of his works.

The artist's most productive period was in the 1910–1920s, when he became a mature master and a brilliant sculptor, when the artisans' school he created became famous far beyond his native region. "Orongoy masters were hired to construct Buddhist and Orthodox temples, living houses, bridges, public buildings in the towns and villages of Zabaykalye and Pribaykalye, sometimes they travelled as far as Krasnoyarsk Krai. Masters of Verkhniy Orongoy built most of the datsans in Zabaykalye. They were invited to build datsans in Mongolia, in Urga (today Ulan-Bator)" [Lenhoboyev, Gerasimova, p. 135].

Apart from wood carving, the masters of his school used the technologically complex papier-mâché technique. First, they carved the sculpture's framework, pasted it over with a fabric, then applied a layer of paper, finely grinded and mixed with the plant-based glue, and then covered it with clay mixed with a glutinous adhesive made from the infusion of certain plant roots. Such compound technique allowed an artist to work out small parts and various fragments in finer details. Within one artwork, they could use different materials and techniques: for the attributes and details they used clay mixed with chalk, fine sand or wood dust; for the fragile details — tin, embossed copper or silver.

The sculptures of his disciples reflect a strong folk tradition: in the depictions of popular gods of longevity, wealth, household protectors it is easy to see the features of fairy-tale Buryat *batars*.

The last stage of S.-Ts. Tsybikov life was tragic. The horrific events of 1930s, the period of repression and the closing of datsan, touched him directly. He lived for the most part in Ochir Bulak ulus, working in "Ulan Tuya" commune as a carpenter, woodworker and blacksmith, making common household utensils. We know that he received commissions from *selsovet* and local history museum — this is confirmed by his last works preserved in the collection: the portrait sculpture of V. I. Lenin, small wooden images of Governor General, City Mayor and the *Noyon*.

In 1931, at night, he was taken to prison of Verkhneudinsk (now Ulan-Ude) where he spent a month together with other lamas. According to his niece, during his time in the prison cell, S.-Ts. Tsybikov was silent and talked to no one. At the end of the month, he was alone in his cell — all other lamas were shot. Besides, it turned out that S.-Ts. Tsybikov's documents disappeared and could not be found; as a result he had to be released.

The Master passed away in 1934.

According to the Buddhist beliefs, the most favorable reincarnation is among people, the best profession is the profession of an artist and a sculptor, since they make the faces and images of deities.

Sanzhi-Tsybik Tsybikov was a "God" — gifted artist, whose art enriched Buryat ethnic culture. He made not only his region, but also his people famous. His name is tied to the first professional school of wooden ritual Buddhist sculpture established in ethnic Buryat region. The works of the Master and the students of his school became a paradigm of the "high" style and an ideal for the generations of artists.

Traditions of Buryat Buddhist visual art were broken in 1930s; in Soviet period, lamas who returned deportations were ready to transfer their knowledge to new disciples. Highly educated lamas — such as the abbot of revived Tsugolsky datsan, the Reverend Zhimba-Zhamso Tsybenov (1904–1995) had a lot of disciples from various parts of former Soviet Union. He was an excellent artist, healer and poet. He was a mentor of the now famous in Russia thangka artist, A. A. Kacharov.

Buryatia tradition of painting continued almost uninterrupted: until 1983 survived one of the last experts on Buddhist laws of art, Lama Danzan Dondokov (1905–1983) who transferred his knowledge to his daughter L. D. Dondokova — who, in turn, transferred them to her daughter Yanzhima and other pupils.

The ancient craft of woodcarving continued to survive despite various social and political cataclysms. Masters from Orongoy continued their "fathers" traditions in secular art. S.-Ts. Tsybikov's grand-nephews, brothers B. G. Zodboyev (1940–1976) and B. D. Enkeyev, were the masters

in woodcarving. S.-Ts. Tsybikov's great-grandson, Geser Zodbayev (1963—2007) was an extraordinary gifted sculptor, who tragically was killed at a young age. Geser worked with all kinds of sculpture — monumental, ritual, ornamental monumental, and in small statuary. In 2008, the Museum of the History of Buryatia named after M. N. Khangalov hold the post-humous exhibition of his works.

At the end of XX century, when the revival of Buryat datsans began, it became vitally necessary to provide them with cult objects.

Among modern masters, stand out the metal sculptor Dmitry Budazhabe who creates monumental works of cast bronze for Buryat datsans, and also works in small statuary, strictly following Buddhist canons. He worked together with the sculptore Geser Zodbayev, who took part in the creation of 2-meter bronze statue of Buddha Shakyamuni.

D. Budazhabe works in the classical tradition of Buddhist art, relying on an example of the classical works of Mongolian ritual art by G. Zana-bazar.

The revival of Buddhist artistic traditions in Buryatia gave impetus for the development of many kinds of Buryat applied and ornamental arts and crafts: artistic objects made from silver, wood, silken applications, horsehair tapestries.

The brilliant sculptures of Dashi Namdakov are world famous; his artistic images draw sharp interest by their unusual plastic, wonderful forms and emotional intensity. Each of his images shows the features of ethnic aesthetics, and the traditions of the old artistic school.

Modern bronze sculpture can be considered a phenomenon, since the casting technique was poorly developed in old Buryatia — mostly, there was embossing and small plastic works in ritual implements and applied art and crafts. Monumental sculptures were commissioned abroad, in China or Mongolia. These were composite sculpture: parts of a figure (usually it consisted of two halves), as well as details and attributes, were separately made and characterized by cast arms and legs. During the assembling, the halves of the figure were welded together, and the separate details were fixed on pins, nails and so on. This technique is considered the “Dolonnor style”, or “Dolonnor school”, since it was created in Dolonnor region of Inner Mongolia. It is thought that Dolonnor workshops were founded by the famous Mongolian Undur Geghen, the outstanding sculptor Gombodorzh Zanabazar (1635—1723).

Traditions of Buddhist wooden sculpture and papier-mache technique are continued by the young artists of Ivolga datsan — Tsyren Sanzhiyev who graduated from the Buddhist University of Mongolia, and Eduard Pavlov. In their work, they follow strict canons of Buddhist iconography and iconometry.

Therefore, modern Buryatia is a witness to a whole host of young all-round artists, so typical for the old Buryat school, the school of



“Orongoy” masters. It is possible to say that Buryat school of sculpture, which follows ethnic artistic tradition, has revived.

The works of each young Buryat artist — both painters and carvers — show the traditional features of ethnic art. But there are no innovations in the ritual art of modern Buryatia. Maybe in time, when religious life stabilized, new masters will appear who, following the strict canons of the images of Buddhist deities, will bring new ideas, their own vision and some technical innovations in their decorations.

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